



SESSION VII.3 - FROM STRATIGRAPHY TO STRATIGRAPHIC EXCAVATION IN PRE- AND PROTOHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY

Stratigraphic excavation is the cornerstone of archaeology; yet scholars have still not attempted a detailed and comparative historical examination of its effective achievement.

We are not referring to the acknowledgement of an effective need to place archaeological material in a stratigraphic framework (accomplished in prehistory in the mid-19th century), but rather to the effective establishment of stratigraphy as a key factor in archaeological excavation, an innovation that we can date to the beginning of the 20th century.

The transition from a mere recognition of stratigraphy to the practice of stratigraphic excavation can be analyzed from various points of view:

- a practical dimension, concerning how an archaeological excavation is conducted. A stratigraphic excavation requires the presence of an archaeologist in the field, and it is well known that for many years this presence lacked continuity and mostly concerned the supervision of specialized workers. When can we say that archaeologists effectively began to excavate in person? Was the process favored by new administrative conditions, or was it the consequence of a new methodological awareness?
- a theoretical dimension. From the beginning the attribution of archaeological finds to a stratum was a method of relative chronology and, at the same time, the main way to reconstruct the connection between artifacts. Today we know that archaeological strata can provide information of their own, and that the horizontal distribution of the archaeological materials is just as important as their vertical distribution. To what extent did the progressive awareness of these (or other) factors determine the definitive affirmation of an effectively stratigraphic method of excavation?
- the context of the effective realization of the stratigraphic practice. Can different methods of excavation and recording of stratigraphy be detected in settlements, caves, and burials? If so, are there relationships between these different methods?
- last but not least, the relationship between different fields of study. Normally we think of a sort of linear evolution from geology to prehistory, and from prehistory to other archaeologies. As a matter of fact, the process was not so linear. If geology is considered as the “cradle” of stratigraphy, what kind of excavation practice did it inspire? And to what extent was it involved in the subsequent developments of archaeological excavation? Were other disciplines, starting with the other archaeologies, involved in the definitive affirmation of the stratigraphic excavation in prehistory?

We invite all interested scholars to debate these themes, without geographical limitations; we are interested in developments all over the world. The focus is on a chronological range between the mid-19th and mid-20th century.

Communications deposit: opening week of 01/06/2017 on <https://uispp2018.sciencesconf.org/>

Communications deposit closure: 30/11/2017

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